

PART IV

METHODOLOGICAL QUESTIONS IN THE STUDY OF ASSERTION

CHAPTER 17

ASSERTION AND CONVENTION

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1. AN EVOLUTIONARY APPROACH AND EIGHT PRELIMINARIES

A number of intertwined questions arise as we consider the relation between assertion and convention.¹ Here are six: (1) Is invocation of a convention either necessary or sufficient for the performance of an act of asserting? (2) Do natural languages contain conventional devices whose job is to signal the making of an assertion? (The more general type of device is sometimes called an illocutionary force indicating device, and the device for assertion is sometimes called the assertion sign). If not, (3) *could* natural languages contain such devices, and if so, (4) *should* they? (5) Can an assertion be made without the use of words (which are on virtually all accounts conventional devices), or (6) without the declarative mood?

I have discussed questions 2–4 elsewhere (Green 1997, 2000b, 2002).² Instead, in what follows I will focus on questions 1 and 6, while remaining neutral on 5. To that end, it will be helpful to view assertion as a practice produced and shaped by cultural evolution (Green 2017b). Cultural evolution helps to explain social phenomena as produced by learning (including but not limited to those cases involving teaching) rather than genetic inheritance, via horizontal (siblings, peers, etc.) rather than (or rather than exclusively) vertical transmission (from parents), and in a way that involves a ratchet-like process so that *ceteris paribus*, the results are cumulative over time (Lewens 2012, 2015). Behaviors in a culture that govern personal space or conversational turn-taking are not genetically inherited; rather, they are rather propagated by learning from siblings, parents, and genetically unrelated community members. These characteristics taken together suggest that such behaviors and the norms that they both support and are guided by are culturally evolved. While there is substantial evidence that some aspects

of language, such as syntax, are the result in large part of genetic evolution,³ that view is less plausible as applied to speech acts. Instead, speech act types develop as institutions aiding speakers to achieve their social aims, such as permitting, guaranteeing, or forbidding certain courses of action, effecting changes in power or status hierarchies, or acquiring and transmitting information. As a first shot, it seems reasonable to suggest that assertion and its cognates are, or are bound up with, social practices designed by cultural evolution to support reliable information transmission.⁴

This evolutionary perspective on assertion justifies us in expecting to find some norms that are plausible candidates for the government of assertoric practice. However, a culturally evolved practice need not be governed by norms so precisely formulated as to be able to handle difficult unforeseen cases. We should thus be unsurprised to find an ambient level of indeterminacy in the formulation of assertoric norms.⁵ Let it, then, not go without argument that such phrases as “assertion’s norm” have a referent (or extension). Perhaps there is at least and at most one such norm (as the mentioned phrase suggests) governing assertion, but from an evolutionary perspective we need not assume that there must be. Instead, the proliferation of candidate norms (those couched in terms of knowledge, belief, truth, justification, and so on—many of which are discussed in this volume as well as in Brown and Cappelen [2014]) suggests that philosophers may be unduly optimistic about the sophistication with which our linguistic practices operate. Such optimism will be misplaced if it turns out that culturally evolved conversational practice is insufficiently refined to satisfy philosophers’ yearning for precision. While, in what follows, we will remain open to an ambient level of indeterminacy about assertoric norms, it will also behoove us to clarify some background concepts and make some preliminary distinctions.

1. *Assertion as objectual or propositional*: As observed in Green (2013), “assertion” is polysemous rather than ambiguous, since the two senses of the term are non-trivially related. In the objectual sense, one can assert one’s rights or authority over, for instance, a bit of land, water, or other resource. One might instead assert one’s authority wordlessly by making use of that resource while, where necessary, manifesting a willingness to defend that use against encroachment.⁶ One can also assert someone else’s authority by acting as a proxy for that person. By contrast, propositional assertion (the more familiar phenomenon to philosophers) is found in cases in which an agent expresses a propositional content in a certain way. Objectual and linguistic assertion do not share a word by accident, however, for both require a measure of moxie. One who asserts her authority over a resource is liable to having that authority challenged. So, too, one who asserts a proposition sticks out her neck, although some careful work is required to articulate the respect or respects in which she does so. In what follows we will use “assertion” to refer to propositional assertion only.

2. *Speaker meaning*: As it is typically understood in a large literature inspired by Grice (1957), an agent speaker-means a content just in case she performs an act intending to produce a psychological effect in an addressee, with the further intention of producing that effect by means of the addressee’s recognition of that intention. This is

sometimes referred to as a reflexive communicative intention, but such a conceptualization of speaker meaning may be challenged on two fronts. First of all, it is doubtful that in order to speaker-mean something, A must intend to produce a psychological effect in some addressee B by means of B's recognition of A's intention that this effect be brought about. As Vlach (1981) has observed, that condition does not seem appropriate for utterances in which we show that something is so, such as we find in some didactic situations: upon completion of a proof, the mathematics teacher who asserts to her class, "So you see, two triangles are in perspective axially if and only if they are in perspective centrally," presumably wants her pupils to believe Desargues's theorem on the strength of her proof. She would be disappointed if any of them believed that theorem even in part for the reason that they felt she intended them to do so. Unless we have some reason for denying that one can assert what one also has proven, this case will be a counterexample to the "reflexivity" part of the standard definition of speaker meaning.

It is even doubtful that to speaker-mean a content, one must also intend to produce a psychological effect on an addressee. Joan of Arc might say to her accusers, "God tells me what to do," without intending that any of them will believe her since she knows how prejudiced they are against her (Vlach 1981). Or I could speak some unkind words to the portrait of my recently deceased, wealthy uncle who left me nothing in his will but this portrait.⁷

The reflexivity condition in the standard conception of speaker meaning is not entirely off the mark. However, that condition should be reformulated so as to require overtness while leaving aside intentions to produce effects on others. An action is overt when it is not only intentional but also when one intends to make the intentional nature of that act manifest.⁸ As illustration, think of the difference between jaywalking inadvertently, jaywalking intentionally, and jaywalking flagrantly. In the last of these cases, one not only jaywalks intentionally but also does so with the intention that this intention be readily available to observers. (One might do this by adding a sashay to one's stride so that the most reasonable explanation of one's behavior is that one is trying to make the intentional nature of one's behavior manifest). But a feature of one's behavior may be readily accessible even if no one in fact accesses it: for any of a host of reasons, others may be distracted, intoxicated, or simply too obtuse to appreciate what one is doing and why.

Speaker meaning as understood here will thus be a matter of overtly manifesting either one's psychological state or one's commitments.

3. *Speech acts and acts of speech*: Acts of speech include all and only those acts involving the uttering of meaningful words. Such utterances need not be vocalizations: use of sign language involves utterances as well. But many acts of speech (such as when we test a microphone or rehearse lines for our part in an upcoming play) are not speech acts in the semitechnical sense of "speech act" used in the pragmatics literature. Instead, as the notion will be used here, a *speech act* is any act that can be performed just by saying and speaker-meaning that you are doing so, so long as you are in the appropriate social or epistemic position to perform such an act, and so long as any required uptake on the part of addressees is forthcoming.⁹ Promising is a speech act on this conception,

since as long as you are in a position to make the promise in question, and perhaps also on the further condition that your addressee accepts it, your saying and speaker meaning, “I promise to meet you tomorrow,” will also be a promise.¹⁰ Excommunicating is a speech act on this conception, since so long as you have the requisite religious authority, merely uttering an appropriate form of words can count as excommunicating someone from a religious organization. By contrast, whispering is not a speech act, since no matter your social position, it is not the case that simply by saying and speaker-meaning that you are whispering, you thereby whisper. Likewise for convincing and impressing. Difficult borderline cases include insulting, since we may disagree about whether it is possible for one person to insult another without the latter feeling insulted. If so, insulting is a speech act, while if not, then insulting is at most a consequence of other speech acts such as asserting, questioning, or suggesting. Further, on the present conception of a speech act, assertion comes out as one. (I shall use “speech act” and “illocutionary act” interchangeably. I shall also sometimes use “illocute” as a verb).

4. *Illocutionary force and semantic content*: Let us also distinguish between the force of a speech act and its content. The latter pertains to what is illocuted, whether it be a proposition or instead the semantic type associated with questions and commands. (We are not, that is, assuming that all content is propositional; instead, there may be distinctive types of content associated with imperative and interrogative sentences; see Green [2018b] for further elaboration). Force instead pertains to the *way* in which that content is illocuted. The content expressed by the remark, “You will be more punctual in the future,” may remain fixed, while in one utterance it is used as the vehicle of a prediction and in another utterance as the vehicle of a command or even a threat. Cognate with the force/content distinction, we may also distinguish between an *asserting* and an *asserted*: the former is a spatiotemporal particular, while the latter is either a proposition or whatever proxy we wish to put in place of propositions should we feel anxiety about positing such things.¹¹

5. *Assertion and the assertive family*: It will also be useful in what follows to distinguish between assertion proper and other members of its family such as conjecture, presumptions, and educated guesses (Green, 2013). All members of the assertive family are united by the feature that their producer is putting forth a content as being true. However, they differ from one another in the nature of the commitment that the speaker undertakes in putting forth that content. For even one who makes an educated guess that P is still putting forth P as true, as is one who conjectures that P. Following Green (2017b), assertion and its kin may be distinguished from other types of illocution, as well as contrasted with one another, in terms of three strands of the notion of commitment that are not consistently disentangled by writers concerned with the topic: liability, frankness, and fidelity (LFF). *Liability*: one who asserts that P is liable to be right or wrong on the issue of P’s truth exactly as P turns out to be true or false; so too for conjecturers and even those who make sheer guesses. *Frankness*: this is another term for sincerity and marks the fact that an assertion is sincere just in case the speaker believes the content she has asserted; analogous remarks hold for other family members.¹² *Fidelity*: this term refers to a possibly inchoate set of behaviors that appear to be

Table 17.1 Three Dimensions of Commitment for Four Members of the Assertive Family and for Two Nonmembers (Sheer Guesses and Suppositions)

Speech Act	Liability	Frankness	Fidelity
Assertion	Y	Y: belief	Y: provide strong justification if challenged
Conjecture	Y	Y: some reason to think content true; perhaps intention to investigate	Y: provide some justification if challenged; readiness to determine truth value of content
Presumption	Y	Y: intention to treat content as true	Y: treat content as true
Educated guess	Y	Y: some reason to think content true	Y: provide some justification if challenged
Sheer guess	Y	N	N
Supposition	N	Y: intention to investigate what follows from content	Y: reason with content to determine what follows

mandated by one who asserts that P; among candidates are willingness to give reasons for the truth of P if challenged, and preparedness to act as if P is true (assuming that the agents' desires are of the relevant sort), and authorizing others to use P as a premise in their reasoning or as a component of conversational common ground. This is not the place to decide just what fidelity to an assertion mandates, but some kind of "walking the walk" is required over and above "talking the talk." Table 17.1 sums up the main points, while treating sheer guesses and suppositions as not being members of the assertive family on account of their not exhibiting all three components of commitment as that notion is understood here.¹³

6. *Signaling and expressing without speaker meaning:* As the term will be used here, a signal is any trait or behavior that conveys information and was designed to convey that information. The design in question may but need not be intentional behavior: just as the heart is designed to pump blood without this fact implying that any agent designed it for this purpose, so too a trait or a bit of behavior may be designed to convey information about an organism by virtue of its being the result of genetic or cultural evolution (Green 2017a). Expressions differ from signals more generally by being signals of psychological states: one expresses one's psychological state just in case one does something, or possesses a trait, that both shows and signals that state (Green 2007, 2011). Some expressions of psychological states may show them by making them perceptible: a case has been made for this claim as it applies to certain emotional expressions (Green 2010, 2016b). Such a claim is less plausible for the expression of beliefs and other cognitive states. However, given the LFF constraints governing assertions, it may be argued that an assertion appropriately made shows the belief it expresses by providing compelling evidence for its presence. In this respect, assertion is analogous to those types of signals known in evolutionary biology as handicaps (Green 2009).

Since neither signaling nor expressing is a species of speaker meaning, neither is sufficient for illocuting either. Nor is saying something in the thin sense of that notion. Thus, for all we have said so far, one's utterance of an indicative sentence could be an act of expression rather than an illocution. For instance, an ironical utterance ("Nice job," said in response to someone's dropping a plate of food onto your lap) might be a way of pretending to compliment another person, while instead expressing a derogatory attitude toward him.¹⁴ So too, as Green (2016a) suggests, many so-called indirect speech acts may be more parsimoniously conceptualized in expressive rather than in illocutionary terms.¹⁵ Further, although Grice and many who follow him take conversational implicata to be cases of speaker meaning, this assumption merits reconsideration: perhaps some implicata are merely expressive. Someone asks Georgina where the cyclotron is, and she replies, "Somewhere in the south of town." She may be speaker-meaning that she is ignorant of any further details about the cyclotron's whereabouts; instead, however, she may merely be aware that were she to give a more informative answer, she would be in violation of the quality maxim,¹⁶ and so says as much as she can with the object of conveying a partial answer and indicating her ignorance. In that case she does not speaker-mean anything beyond what she says but might for all that be signaling her state of incomplete information.

Further, an illocutionary act could acquire an expressive dimension by virtue of the way in which it is carried out: intonation, prosody, and like features could imbue an utterance with an expressive quality such as sadness, anger, surprise, or contempt.

7. *Illocutions versus illocutionary commitment*: Assertion and other members of the assertive family are not deductively closed. That is, if I assert that P, and assert that P implies Q, I have not thereby asserted Q. However, I am committed to Q, and committed to Q in a certain way, which for lack of better terminology I will call *assertoric* commitment. Further, for certain purposes we want to keep track of the way in which a speech act can engender commitments that are sensitive to force and not just to content. If I assert P, but put forth if P then Q as a conjecture, then although I am not assertorically committed to Q, I am still committed to that content. In particular, I am committed to Q as a conjecture. For each member of the assertive family, we may discern a distinctive mode of commitment.

An explanation of why assertion and other members of the assertive family are not deductively closed is that one cannot inadvertently assert (conjecture, etc.) something. One might inadvertently commit oneself to a future course of action (say by accidentally clicking on a "pay now" button amid an electronic transaction), but doing so is not a promise to pay. So too, although one can inadvertently commit oneself to the truth of a proposition, one cannot do so in the distinctive way characteristic of assertions. A ready explanation of this fact is that assertion is a creature of intention: we'll see this more clearly later in the course of exploring the relation of assertion to speaker meaning.

8. *Conventions*: I take a convention to be a regularity in behavior that has some degree of arbitrariness and that is supported or sustained by normativity. For instance, driving on the right side of the road in certain countries is a conventional form of

behavior in those places due to the facts that it is relatively widespread, those following this pattern of behavior could have adopted a different practice (like driving on the right or switching annually, etc.), and that given that most people do drive on the right, it behooves me to follow suit. Driving conventions are plausibly solutions to coordination problems, but brief reflection reveals that many conventions neither are, nor are designed to be, such solutions.¹⁷

Given this understanding of convention, it comes out as uncontroversial, as it should, that words have the semantic properties that they do as a matter of convention. We could have used other words than those in use to say the things we do, but given that we do use the words that we do in our language(s), it behooves most of us to fall in with the behavior of the majority. Since practical rationality is one form of normativity, it being in our interest to fall in line with others is enough to count as a form of normativity. Also, a pattern of behavior can be conventional even if all parties to that pattern are ignorant of this fact; they might even think it is the only possible way of doing things. Further, nothing in the aforementioned account rules out the possibility of a convention whose character is in part due to an organism's phenotype. Many nonhuman animal species use alarm calls to signal the presence of predators (Green 2017a). A species having *an* alarm call system is not conventional, since such a system does a job that no other feasibly accessible system could do for these species. However, given that a species has such a system, different dialects within subpopulations of that species may differ from one another conventionally. For instance, dialects among alarm call systems in Gunnison's prairie dogs (*Cynomys gunnisoni*) may count as different conventional ways of signaling the presence of predators (Slobodchikoff, Ackers, and Van Ert 1998) so long those differences cannot be fully accounted for in functional terms.

2. TWO SPECIES OF CONVENTIONALISM ABOUT ASSERTION

A thesis supporting the conventional character of illocutions generally, or of members of the assertive family, or of assertion specifically, should invoke on its behalf more than just the conventional nature of linguistic meaning. This is so for two reasons. First of all, no tokening of a semantically contentful expression is sufficient for illocuting. For instance, as observed in Green (2017b), a somnambulist might utter the words, "It's raining outside," without making any assertion. Second, imagine someone reporting his new discovery of the conventional nature of *sarcasm*: sarcasm, research shows (Cheang and Pell 2008), is verbalized irony, with the further requirement that sarcasm tends to be used to express negative attitudes. Further, he continues, it is a *sui generis* form of activity that can only occur in the presence of conventions giving meaning to the words that are its vehicle. Surely this is banal. The bulk of what

is interesting about sarcasm is what it shares in common with irony. Likewise, if there is anything interestingly conventional about sarcasm, it should be shared in common with irony as well.

A more plausible conventionalist strategy will claim that speech acts require for their occurrence a layer of conventions that obtain over and above those giving words their meaning. Following Green (2014), call this *force-conventionalism*. We would not expect to unearth such a layer of conventions in explaining how it is possible conversationally to implicate contents: conversational norms such as the cooperative principle, and the maxims of relation, quality, and the like, more likely flow from general constraints on effective conversation. Likewise, force-conventionalism is not established by the phenomenon of conventional implicature, which is driven by conventions governing lexical meaning.

Millikan (1998) defends a conception of convention that shares the two characteristics of arbitrariness and normativity given earlier while eschewing the requirement of regularity.¹⁸ She calls conventions as she construes them natural conventions, and on the assumption that natural conventions are a type of convention, one would expect this strategy to make it easier to defend the view that speech acts are inherently conventional. For Millikan, a *natural convention* is constituted by patterns that are reproduced by virtue of what she terms the weight of precedent (1998, 2). A pattern is *reproduced* just in case it has a form that derives from a previous entity having, in certain respects, the same form, and in such a way that had the previous form been different in those respects, the current form would be different in those respects as well (1998, 3). Photocopying is one form of reproduction meeting these criteria; the retinotopic mapping from patterns of stimulation on the retina to patterns of stimulation in the visual cortex is evidently another. Millikan would not treat retinotopic mapping as a type of convention, however, since it would not seem to be perpetuated by virtue of the weight of precedent. Insofar as Millikan cashes out the metaphor of weight, she does so in terms of what is in the best interests of the parties to the convention in question.¹⁹ In this respect she invokes normativity without using that terminology.

Millikan next tells us that just as the conventions of chess dictate that when one's king is in check, one does what one can to get him out of check; so too the conventions of language dictate that when *A* tells *B* that *P*, *B* responds by believing that *P*. Millikan also describes the hearer's response as a hidden, inner act that is not under *B*'s voluntary control (1998, 6). Millikan further describes this response as being learned in the way that we learn what she calls "natural sign patterns," such as our learning that the sound of crashing waves is an indication of a nearby coastline.

On Millikan's view, then, *A*'s assertion of *P* being followed by *B*'s belief that *P* is a process that is not intrinsically superior to others that might have been followed. Once we prise apart the way in which the semantic content of the sentence expressing the proposition *P* is conventional, the position may be doubted. What, after, all would be an equally efficacious alternative response? *Disbelieving P*? Remaining neutral on the question of *P*? Scratching one's left earlobe? Any of these responses would tend to undermine using language as a means of transmission of information.²⁰

What is missing from Millikan's view is an appreciation of the fact that assertion has a job to do in linguistic communities even if no agent or agents ever consciously designed the practice to do that job. Instead, assertion's role in the reliable transmission of information brings with it design features supporting that role, and which are thus not arbitrary. This in turn is why, modulo some indeterminacy about the particular form that the standards take (knowledge, justification, truth, etc.), speakers who attain those standards can reasonably expect their addressees to accept what they say unless they harbor some unforeseen ground for skepticism. There are many ways of shaking hands other than the form that is dominant in modern, Western societies that would work equally well as social greetings. Modulo the aforementioned indeterminacy, there is only one way of making and responding to assertions if that practice is to subserve reliable transmission of information.

An ordinary-language tradition advocated by philosophers such as Austin, Searle, and Dummett insists on a different basis that assertion is a conventional act. Austin (1962), for instance, holds that all of what he calls illocutionary acts depend for their occurrence on the invocation of conventions. In characterizing felicity conditions for speech acts, for instance, he writes,

There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances. (1962, 14)

Austin's student J. Searle follows him in this, writing,

...utterance acts stand to propositional and illocutionary acts in the way in which, e.g., making an *X* on a ballot paper stands to voting. (1969, 24)

Searle elaborates on this remark, writing,

...the semantic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a series of sets of underlying constitutive rules, and...speech acts are acts characteristically performed by uttering sentences in accordance with these sets of constitutive rules. (1969, 37)

Searle espouses a weaker form of force conventionalism than does Austin in leaving open the possibility that some speech acts can be performed without constitutive rules. Nevertheless, Searle does contend that speech acts are characteristically performed by invoking constitutive rules. Such conventions appear to be extra-semantic in that they go beyond those imbuing words with meaning. On this force-conventionalist view, one who utters

- (1) Bucharest is the capital of Romania

only makes an assertion if she invokes or is otherwise subject to a convention to the effect that appropriate utterances of certain forms of words are either necessary or sufficient for assertion.

Strawson (1964) challenges force-conventionalism on the ground that while some speech acts, such as declaring war or marrying, apparently depend on extra-semantic conventions, it is doubtful that all do. Accepting is a speech act on the criterion given earlier, but it would seem that I can accept a proffered morsel of food simply by manifesting my willingness to do so, and I could do this outside of a shared culture in which any conventions would have a chance to develop.

Strawson proposes instead that some speech acts rely for their occurrence not on (extra-semantic) conventions, but rather on the speaker's manifesting appropriate intentions. On his line of thought, one who utters (1) in such a way as to manifest an intention that it be taken as a statement of known fact rather than, say, a supposition for argument's sake or a conjecture thereby asserts that Bucharest is the capital of Romania. This view may acknowledge that certain other speech acts such as excommunicating and promoting depend on extra-semantic conventions. For the remainder, Strawson advocates explaining them as types of speaker meaning, itself elucidated in intentionalist terms. The challenge is to specify the type needed to, for instance, differentiate asserting from conjecturing and from guessing. To that end we will next articulate two approaches to assertion, one in the tradition of construing it as the expression of belief, and the other giving pride of place to a view of assertion as an undertaking of commitment.

3. TWO NONCONVENTIONALIST APPROACHES TO ASSERTION

3.1. Assertion as Belief Expression

Given the close connection between assertion and the intentional expression of belief, some authors have attempted to define assertion in terms of expression and intention. Bernard Williams, for instance, says, "A asserts that *p* where A utters a sentence *S* which means that *p*, in doing which either he expresses his belief that *p*, or he intends the person addressed to take it that he believes that *p*" (2002, 74). As Green (2013) argues, however, this characterization is inadequate since its conditions can be satisfied in a situation that is not one of assertion: rehearsing lines for a performance of *Guys and Dolls* in which I'm about to play the role of Big Jule, I utter the words, "If it gets around in Chicago that I went to a prayer meeting, no decent person will talk to me!" I know that you are eavesdropping from within my closet, and I am aware further that you don't realize that I'm merely rehearsing lines for a play. Out of spite, I also intend you to think, based on my utterance, that I believe that I went to a prayer meeting. However, I have not asserted that I went to a prayer meeting, but instead have only made as if to assert this. In this situation, then, I satisfy Williams's conditions for making an assertion but have not in fact made one. This, in turn, suggests that his conditions are too broad for delineating

assertion proper. (A moment's reflection will reveal that his conditions are also too broad to characterize other members of the assertive family).

The utterance in the foregoing example is intentional but not overt. Accordingly, a more promising account of assertion in the same spirit is that of Bach and Harnish, who define a speaker's asserting that *p* as occurring just in case that speaker expresses a belief that *p* while also expressing an intention that her addressee come to believe that *p* by means of recognition of his intention (1979, 42). Because of its reliance on audience-directed intentions, this definition would seem to run afoul of cases in which a speaker addresses an assertion to an implacable accuser (as in the earlier Joan of Arc case), an inanimate object (as in the earlier case of one's uncle's portrait), a nonlinguistic animal, or a prelinguistic human.

A view of assertion avoiding these difficulties construes it as an overt expression of belief. Such an act may be sincere, in which case the speaker is expressing *her* belief; on the other hand, the speaker may be dissimulating, in which case her act is merely *expressive* of belief. Unfortunately for addressees, it is not always clear whether a speaker is expressing her own view or instead just appearing to do so. However, in light of what I elsewhere call the genitive-or-generic account of expression,²¹ she is expressing belief either way. Also, the overtness that our account builds in does not require audience-directed intentions, while also sidestepping the difficulties facing Williams's account. Further, since one evidently can also express cognate states of mind such as conjectures and guesses, we may see a path to the characterization in expressive terms of other members of the assertive family.²²

MacFarlane (2009) challenges the view of assertion as belief expression on the ground that it cannot distinguish between assertion and conversational implicature. The reason is that one who conversationally implicates *P* would also seem to be expressing her belief that *P*; yet conversational implicature and assertion are normally taken to be exclusive categories. We have already seen, however, that some types of conversational implicature should be seen as signals rather than as instances of speaker meaning; that was the gist of the cyclotron case earlier. In that case the speaker expresses but does not overtly express her belief that she can be no more specific about the cyclotron's whereabouts. The view of assertion as overt belief expression will therefore not be harried by such cases. On the other hand, some implicata not only violate but also flout conversational norms. This is what occurs in many cases of "damning with faint praise." Here it is plausible that the speaker is not just expressing but also overtly expressing her belief that the entity being faintly praised is mediocre. But it is also plausible that the speaker is telling her audience that the entity being faintly praised is mediocre. A member of the admissions, hiring, or promotion committee might read such a letter and remark, "The recommender told us what we need to know." But since telling is a species of assertion, the writer has also made an assertion.

Suppose that future space exploration reveals a planet inhabited by individuals who speak the language of first-order predicate logic. The discovery would be enthralling but also bittersweet because such speakers would lack the linguistic tools for making distinctions that help conversation go smoothly. Lacking *it*-clefts (and in the absence of

some other device to do the job such as intonation), for instance, they would be unable to indicate that a bit of information has already been established in conversational common ground, as we find with

- (2) It was Norbert who ate cheese.

A speaker of (2) normally presupposes, rather than asserts, that someone ate cheese and proffers the proposition that Norbert is the culprit in the cheese incident for addition to our stock of information. This is consistent with our account of assertion as overt belief expression, because it may be doubted that the speaker of (2) overtly indicated her belief that someone ate cheese. She may have indicated that belief in so speaking, perhaps even intentionally, but neither condition suffices for overtness.

Presupposition is usually understood as contrasting with assertion so that a content cannot be both presupposed and asserted in one and the same utterance. However, so-called informative presuppositions challenge this simple picture. Consider this exchange about a new employee in our office:

- A. George sure is handsome!
B. His fiancé thinks so, too.²³

B's response is likely intended to notify A that George is affianced, and B is naturally construed as doing so overtly. On the conception of assertion as overt belief expression, B is thus asserting that George is spoken for. True, the genitive construction by which B achieves this result is normally thought of as a locus of presupposition rather than of assertion. This, however, is no serious challenge to the belief-expression view of assertion suggested here. Instead our response to the present case should be to point out that some linguistic constructions normally designed for one kind of job can sometimes be co-opted for another.

The foregoing belief-expressivist account of assertion is neutral on the question whether all assertions require the use of language. (Whether they do or not presumably depends on what is required to make one's intentions overt). Finally, this belief-expressivist account is not only consistent with but also can account for the relevant LFF properties. For one who believes that P is liable to be right or wrong in the issue of P precisely when P is true or false; her expression of belief is frank only if she believes the proposition she expresses; and her believing that P would, if she is rational, incline her to respond to appropriate challenges of the form, "Why do you think that?" with strong reasons in support of what she believes.

3.2. Assertion as Commitment Undertaking

We need not here decide between the foregoing belief-expression account of assertion and a different account on which it consists in a certain kind of undertaking of commitment.

If instead we can establish that on either account, assertion can occur without conventions—or at least without extra-semantic conventions—that will only strengthen our case. An early version of the assertion-as-commitment view is Searle (1969), who construes an assertion of *P* as an “undertaking to the effect that *P*.” Such an account is a necessary condition at best, since other members of the assertive family satisfy it as well. Further, such an account leaves it unclear whether someone could satisfy it by privately judging that *P*. For in such a case we also have an undertaking.

A more promising version of the approach will see assertion as an overt undertaking of commitment, in line with the notion earlier of speaker meaning in terms of overtness. Here, too, however, further refinement is needed, since as we have seen, commitment, even to the contents of indicative sentences, comes in different forms. Accordingly we may here construe assertion as the overt undertaking of assertoric commitment. So long as we can offer an independent account of the difference between assertoric and other forms of commitment, this account will not be circular. Such an account is found on the appropriate row of Table 17.1.

As with the view of assertion as overt belief expression, an elucidation of assertion in terms of overt commitment may remain neutral on whether verbalization is required for assertion. While intuitions about assertion may be equivocal, it seems clear that one cannot *tell* someone something, or *say* that something is so, unless one uses language; and these two are near-enough synonyms to “assert” to raise doubt about it as well. A full sentence is not, however, required for asserting, telling, or saying. To see why, consider the following case. Suppose that I have witnessed a crime, and some authorities are now seeking to ascertain the identity of the perpetrator. They have reason to think I know the perpetrator’s identity but do not want her or him to know that I know this. For this reason the authorities arrange to have their top suspects congregate together on the pretext of an irrelevant bureaucratic issue (such as that they all need to be in a certain office to have a form signed) and arrange to have me be present at the time of their meeting. One of the authorities is present as well. When these suspects congregate as arranged, I, spotting the perpetrator, write the name “Mr. Pink” on a slip of paper and surreptitiously hand it to the authority.

Here it would seem I have told the authorities who the perpetrator is and, therefore, that I have asserted that Mr. Pink is the perpetrator. (It is less clear what I have said. It may be that in this case I have only said, “Mr. Pink.”) While some pragmatic reasoning will evidently be required on the part of the authorities to discern the content that I have asserted on the basis of what I have uttered, we should not infer from this that I have merely conversationally implicated that Mr. Pink is the perpetrator. Pragmatic processes issuing in the determination of what is illocuted are distinct from the process of determining a conversational implicature.²⁴ Furthermore, we have good reason to deny that such an utterance is merely elliptical for “Mr. Pink is the perpetrator.”²⁵ Nonetheless, both the belief-expression and commitment view of assertion may see this case as falling within its remit: when I write “Mr. Pink” on the paper, I not only express but also overtly express my belief that that man is the perpetrator. Similarly, in so doing, I have undertaken the three LFF components of commitment characteristic of assertion as delineated

earlier: I am liable to be correct or incorrect depending on whether Mr. Pink is indeed the perpetrator; I would be rightly charged with lying if I did not believe that Mr. Pink is the perpetrator; and I am responsible for putting up some sort of defense if challenged on the contention that Pink is the perpetrator.

It will be helpful to keep this background in mind as we consider a recent argument for force-conventionalism.

4. A RECENT ARGUMENT FOR FORCE-CONVENTIONALISM

Michael Dummett writes,

...assertion consists in the (deliberate) utterance of a sentence which, by its form and context, is recognized as being used according to a certain general convention.
(1973, 311)

Dummett may here be read as making a weaker or a stronger claim. According to *Strong Dummett*, it is necessary and sufficient for asserting that P, that one deliberately utter a sentence that expresses the content P. According to *Weak Dummett*, it is necessary and sufficient for asserting that P, that one deliberately utter a sentence in a situation in which others recognize that one is invoking a convention counting that utterance as an assertion of P. We could worry the threads of either of these accounts. (For instance, does the deliberate utterance that either requires mandate not just that the speaker says what she does deliberately, but also that she knew what she was getting herself into?) We need not to fuss over such details here, however. Instead, let us note straightaway two problems with Strong Dummett. First, as Davidson (1979) argues, one could deliberately utter an indicative sentence without meaning it, for instance in the course of being sarcastic: I say, "That was brilliant," in response to your spilling lighter fluid over the meager bit of food we have left in this desolate wilderness. I have not asserted that your performance was brilliant and yet have met the condition specified in Strong Dummett.²⁶ Second, as Stainton (2016) observes, one can make assertions without using whole sentences, such as we observed in the Mr. Pink case earlier.

Stainton (2016) advocates a view that preserves Weak Dummett's spirit if not its letter. His starting point is a distinction between two classes of verbs and their associated actions:

A-class: Asserting, affirming, claiming, telling, stating, saying, declaring, avowing, professing

B-class: Giving to understand, implying, conveying, intimating, insinuating, hinting

The reader might find this distinction puzzling, since both classes are heterogeneous. For unless Stainton is using “say” in the idiosyncratic way that Grice did,²⁷ on its more typical use, one can say that P without committing oneself to P or to any other related proposition. By contrast, all the other A-list verbs involve commitment to contents. Instead, if they are united by any property at all, it is in mandating verbalization.²⁸

Stainton claims that the project of his essay is to discern the difference between the concepts referred to in the A-list and those in the B-list (396). However, he also coins a word to cover the A-list terms, *full-on stating*, which in some of his usage seems to be a type of stating that is paradigmatic. (He also uses “straight-up” [395] and “full-blown” [401] to describe the phenomenon of interest to him). However, others of the author’s uses of “full-on” allow it to characterize subsentential assertions, which presumably are genuine speech acts but are not paradigmatic. Here “full-on,” “straight-up,” and “full-blown” seem just to mean “real” or “genuine.” These two distinct uses of “full-on” raise the danger of equivocation. The reason is that a full understanding of, for instance, claiming, would include discussion of nonparadigmatic cases, such as those that are not sincere or are cryptic in some respect. If, however, one views the A-list items through the lens of a “full-on” illocution sensu a paradigmatic one, those non-paradigmatic usages will be defined away or at least swept into the background. To safeguard against mischief, we shall keep an eye out for genuine but nonparadigmatic instances of A-list items.

Stainton also distinguishes between language-transcendent and linguistically constituted actions. The former include the act of accepting something, such as a morsel of food. One can use language to accept something (for instance, by saying, “Thanks; I accept!”) but need not do so. The linguistically constituted class includes writing a sonnet, as well as being sarcastic, as previously discussed. Just as the introduction of words creates the possibility of sarcasm, so, too, the introduction of the declarative mood, Stainton avers, creates the possibility of full-on stating via a sentence in that mood. It is accordingly not possible to full-on state (assert, claim, tell, etc.) until the declarative mood has been introduced into the language; assertion is for this reason linguistically constituted. However, Stainton contends that once full-on stating is possible, speakers may also full-on state that P without using a complete sentence, for instance by using a subsentence lacking grammatical mood. He fleshes this out with a five-stage just-so story:

- i) Prior to the existence of full-on stating, there was quasi-stating, a language-transcendent action of, say, sharing information, expressing beliefs, etc.
- ii) It proved convenient and efficient to have a conventional linguistic tool specifically for quasi-stating, so the declarative mood came to be.
- iii) When that function-bearing device arose, it birthed a new *sui generis* conventionally-constituted kind of action, full-on stating.
- iv) That novel speech act brought in its wake a novel way in which an agent may fail, namely he may lie. Put in terms of another metaphor, a new kind of “target” arose, such that one who hits it can go morally wrong in a new way.
- v) Finally, clever and creative people found ways to achieve the *sui generis*

action, full-on stating, without using the job-laden device—thereby nonetheless incurring the new sort of “normative risk,” i.e. opening themselves up to the novel means of failing, the one unique to the A-class actions, lying. (2016, 407)

We have agreed that all activities named by members of the A-list require verbalization; yet Stainton is making a stronger claim than that members of this list require verbalization. (That’s all to the good, for if he were not, then his claim would be no more interesting than the claim that sarcasm is conventional because it requires verbalization). Instead, his contention here is that the syntactical category of the declarative mood is intimately related to the pragmatic property of being an assertion. That intimate relation is expressed in the ideas that assertions (stating, etc.) are acts that cannot be performed unless they occur in a language containing the declarative mood.

It has for decades been widely agreed among philosophers that there can be no intimate connection between any particular form of words (such as “x is good”) and a pragmatic property (such as approving). Any attempt to link the two conventionally will be unstable because, inevitably, jokers, storytellers, and microphone testers will use the form of words without instantiating the pragmatic property; in many cases, they could just as well instantiate the pragmatic property without using the form of words. The denial of a link between lexical items and pragmatic properties has been enshrined in the thesis of “On the Autonomy of Linguistic Meaning” (Green 1997). But pragmatic phenomena are not just autonomous of linguistic meaning; they are autonomous of grammatical properties as well. The active voice is by comparison with the passive voice better suited to representing agency. Yet no one could reasonably claim that representation of agency is only possible in a language containing active constructions. Or imagine a contention on behalf of the linguistically constituted nature of some forms of talk about the past. In English, the past perfect tense has the distinctive role of enabling speakers to refer to past events that are already completed. Should we conclude that the introduction of the past perfect birthed a wholly novel, *sui generis*, language-constituted kind of action? Such a conclusion would be warranted only if there were no other way in which to present past events as already completed. But surely a speaker could refer to a past event with facial expression, gesture, or intonation in such a way as to indicate that the event is completed.

Similarly, Estonian uses the narrative mood, which enables speakers to characterize events as ones about which they have only secondhand evidence, rather than being ones they have witnessed themselves (Metslang and Sepper 2010). This is a useful device. But that acknowledgment is a far cry from the momentous claim that the introduction of the narrative mood at some point in the history of Estonian created a wholly novel, *sui generis*, language-constituted act. Instead, speakers who do not or cannot avail themselves of the narrative mood may use facial expression, intonation, or gesture to indicate that they lack direct knowledge of the events they report; failing that, they may avail themselves of indirect discourse. No compelling reason yet presents itself for differentiating Stainton’s declarative mood contention, on the one hand, from our evidently fanciful claims about the active voice, past perfect, and narrative moods, on the other.

5. AN AUSTERE LANGUAGE IN WHICH TO ASSERT

In the previous section I argued that the intimate connection Stainton imputes between the declarative mood and full-on stating is inadequately supported. In this section I will first argue that it is possible to full-on state in a language entirely lacking in declarative mood. Stainton avers that it is necessary and sufficient for full-on stating that one perform an act in which it is possible to lie (2016, 407). I will assume this biconditional in what follows. If my argument is sound, it will show that Stainton's claimed intimate connection is not just inadequately supported but also incorrect.

Stainton need not take issue with the Mr. Pink case of the previous section, since his story also includes stage (v). However, we may challenge his account by offering a rival, more parsimonious just-so story that dispenses with stage (ii): that is, revise the earlier quoted just-so story so that it eschews the supposition of the introduction of the declarative mood. In this new story, speakers still use words to say things, but only ever in the form of subsentences such as noun phrases (NPs), verb phrases, prepositional phrases, and adjectival phrases, and the like, allowing their interlocutors to discern the rest of what they mean with the aid of inference to the best explanation.

Speakers in this clauseless community—call them speakers of Phrasish, which allows for the construction of no declarative sentences—may not be able to full-on, straight-up, or full-blown state in the “paradigmatic” sense of that term. Indeed, Phrasish is depauperate in other respects: like the aliens' language of first-order predicate logic of section 2, it does not readily allow for the delineation within an utterance of a main as opposed to a subsidiary point. So too, explicit inferential reasoning will be difficult at best. None of these deficiencies, however, prevents Phrasish from being a language in which speakers can make assertions, claims, or statements. Further, this is so whether we assume an elucidation of assertion in terms of overt belief expression or an elucidation of that notion in terms of overt commitment.

Further support for the view that speakers of Phrasish can make assertions is that they can lie. We can readily imagine a revision of the Mr. Pink case in which this occurs. Or take a PP case: imagine a horse in our care has got away, and we are wondering where it might be. I, who watched it go there, say, “Behind the barn.” Unless you have greatly misconstrued the intentions with which I spoke, you may readily deduce that I am claiming, of this horse, that it has a certain property. I am thus a liar if I saw that animal canter into the woods. Such *de re* attributions, however, are too primitive to require characterization in terms of the declarative mood.

If our analysis is correct, then, assertion turns out to be a language-constituted act only to the extent that it requires verbalization; however, assertion does not require verbalization in the form of a declarative sentence but instead can be achieved with a phrasal utterance. Furthermore, such phrasal assertions can be carried out in a linguistic community in which no declarative mood is in use.

Carstairs-McCarthy (2005) and Hinzen (2007) have also argued that the declarative mood is inessential for asserting. The latter contends that there could be a language in which speakers only use NPs to communicate. Speakers could, for instance use such NPs as “the present Emperor of Japan” to claim that Japan has a unique, current emperor. Hinzen contends further that instead of assessment in terms of truth, uses of such NPs could be assessed in terms of “applicability.” The aforementioned NP is applicable, on this usage, while an NP such as “the present emperor of China” is not since that country no longer has an emperor.

Jary (this volume) responds to Hinzen by contending that if his imagined language-community did use NPs to make assertions, then those NPs would come to have the declarative mood: “... even if Carstairs-McCarthy and Hinzen are right and the category of sentence is not required for assertion, accepting this does not entail accepting that the declarative mood is not required for assertion. Rather, consideration of their arguments leads to the conclusion that assertion does require a form-function pairing. In the scenario that these authors ask us to consider, one in which a language has no verbs and, hence, no clauses, NPs would be assertoric forms and so declarative in mood.”

In arguing for his conclusion, Jary would apparently have to assume that if a linguistic type is regularly used in a certain way, then it must come to have grammatical properties reflective of that usage. It seems more parsimonious to suggest that such grammaticalization *may* occur, but need not do so. Further, we may note that even if Jary is correct to hold that in Hinzen’s scenario, NPs must become grammaticalized to reflect their use to make assertions, that will provide no succor to the conventionalist about assertion. For the imputed inevitability of the declarative mood will violate one of the requirements for convention, namely arbitrariness. On such an approach to the declarative mood, its use in assertions is no more conventional than is the having of a sharp edge useful for enabling knives to cut things.

Without considering Phrasish by name, Jary also in effect considers the possibility that a view of assertion as belief expression could support the view that speakers of Phrasish can make assertions. He rejects this view on the ground that MacFarlane (2009) has raised objections to the belief-expression approach to assertion. However, we have seen that those objections do not undermine the account of assertion as overt belief expression. As such, we may still claim to have made a reasonable case that assertion is facilitated by, but not crucially dependent upon, the presence of the declarative mood in the language community in which that speech act takes place.

Returning now to the questions ((1), (5), and (6)) with which we began, we may now see that invocation of a convention is not necessary for the making of an assertion; see note 1 for a qualified claim that it is sufficient. We have not taken a stand on (5), and we have answered (6) in the negative.

NOTES

1. My thanks to Sandy Goldberg, Mark Jary, and Lionel Shapiro for their insightful comments on earlier drafts of this essay.
2. In the papers cited, I argue that natural language neither does nor could contain devices the tokening of which is sufficient for the making of an assertion or any other speech act.

This suggests (though it does not entail) that it is not the case that natural languages should contain such devices. However, I also argue that some natural languages contain devices, which I call weak illocutionary force indicators, the tokening of which in a speech act is sufficient for the performance of at least one other speech act.

3. See Fitch (2010) for an overview of the evidence.
4. Garcia-Carpintero (2004) offers a complimentary perspective.
5. Such indeterminacy would be over and above the indeterminacy that we confront not just in the ascription of attitudinal content but also in the ascription of attitudinal modality itself. For arguments for the latter claim, see Green (1999).
6. In this respect, objectual assertion is a signal in the sense of that term delineated in point 6.
7. We might try to defend the standard account of speaker meaning by suggesting that in some of these cases the speaker is only making as if to speaker-mean something. This might be plausible if she were not intending to be held accountable for what she says. However, someone lost in the woods might call for help without intending to be heard, due to her judgment of the extreme unlikelihood of anyone else being within earshot. She might nevertheless intend to be held accountable for what she says. More broadly, while we need not see the counterexamples in the text to the psychological condition as being decisive, together they can motivate consideration of other possible formulations of the concept of speaker meaning that would avoid such controversy.
8. Not just any old others, however: we sometimes communicate cryptically in such a way that our remarks are designed to be discernible only to a select few.
9. This characterization is developed more fully in Green (2014). The term “say” here is used in the “thin” sense of being a locutionary act. Also, the formulation in the text does not imply that every speech act type carries substantial requirements concerning a speaker’s social or epistemic position.
10. Whether promising requires uptake is a question that we need not settle here.
11. Green (2018b) develops and refines the force/content distinction and defends the resulting view against recent challenges.
12. Goldberg (2015) denies that all proper assertions must be sincere, contending instead that in some cases, such as when a philosopher is defending a position, an assertion may be proper so long as the speaker is “relevantly authoritative.” I would tend to categorize such utterances as conjectures rather than as assertions, but if I am mistaken about this, then no harm is incurred in formulating the frankness condition for the assertion row of Table 17.1 disjunctively.
13. Shapiro (this volume) provides a rich and historically informed account of the various approaches that might be taken in elucidating the commitments that would seem to be associated with assertion.
14. Green (2017d) offers a characterization of communicative irony in expressive terms.
15. See also Bertolet (2017), who argues that well-known considerations in favor of positing indirect speech acts are less persuasive than is widely thought.
16. “Make your contribution as informative as is required (for current purposes of the exchange).” Grice (1967), 26.
17. Gilbert (1989) denies the arbitrariness condition on the ground that, for instance, it is conventional to write a thank-you note to a host after a dinner party; but she sees nothing arbitrary in this practice. I would rejoin that although expressing gratitude for a kindness is not arbitrary, nevertheless, expressing such gratitude by means of a thank-you note is. (We could just as well have adopted a practice of sending flowers or inviting the host to lunch).

18. Millikan denies the regularity requirement, contending that there are conventional behaviors (such as writing a thank-you note to the host after a party or handing out cigars after the birth of a child) that are uncommon.
19. "A pattern may prevail over easily invented alternatives merely because it is easier or more natural to copy than to use one's imagination, or because people prefer to do as others do... or because what is familiar is as such pleasing, or because people feel more secure in the tried and true" (Millikan 1998, 8).
20. We should also be dubious of Millikan's claim that believing what one has been told is an act that is not under one's voluntary control. While it is plausible that we normally spontaneously and unreflectively accept what we are told by sources we know to be reliable, we also need to keep in view the importance, and presumably also the possibility of, a skeptical, Missouri-style attitude that encourages us to demur from others' claims that we find some reason to doubt.
21. According to the account offered in Green (2016b) (itself a generalization of that offered in Green [2007] and Green [2011]), one expresses psychological state *S* just in case one does something that expresses one's *S*, or is expressive of *S*. Further elucidations are then provided to explain what is involved in expressing one's own psychological state, as well as of doing something, that is expressive of a psychological state.
22. I am assuming that one can make conjectures, guesses, and suppositions for the sake of argument in the privacy of one's thoughts, and that one can also perform speech acts that express the states of mind that such private acts help to constitute. (See Green [2000a] for further discussion). Also, the expressivist account of assertion developed here might seem, objectionably, to rule out the possibility of anonymous assertions. Pedro comes out to his car from the hardware store to find that someone has left under a windshield wiper a note with the words, "You're bald, Mister!" The writer of the unkind note is anonymously asserting that Pedro is bald. I contend that such an act is still overt: the writer is making manifest her intention to manifest her belief, while at the same time keeping hidden whose belief it is. A similar point would be applicable to a case in which a person leaves a recorded message for Pedro but distorts the recording in such a way as to mask her identity.
23. The example is inspired by one from Stalnaker (2014).
24. I argue for the point in Green (2017c).
25. See Stainton (2006) for detailed arguments for this same conclusion.
26. Kölbel responds to examples of this kind on behalf of a strong form of force-conventionalism. He imagines "A and B, who are work colleagues... conversing during their lunch break in a café near their workplace. Their boss, C, is mentioned. C is notoriously stingy and obsessed with his employees getting back on time from their lunch breaks. A utters: 'You know, C has decided to hand out lunch-packs from now on and to force us to have lunch in the office. The cost will be deducted from our salaries.' The joke will work particularly well if B takes it seriously for a moment. But should we say that A's utterance was *not* an assertion that C has decided to hand out lunch packs, and so on? I believe that would be counterintuitive. Now, Davidson might insist that it is not an assertion, because it is a joke. But how do we explain that the joke works particularly well if B initially takes it seriously? I believe the best explanation is that A's utterance was an assertion... and that as a result of a pragmatic process, it does not, ultimately count as a vicious attempt to deceive B, but as a prank or joke" (Kölbel 2010, 121). Kölbel describes his overall position as one on which the rules of language specify that a certain form of conduct (uttering an

- assertoric sentence), carried out under certain general conditions (being a member of a speech community engaged in a conversation), counts as making an assertion. Given this position as well as Kölbel's response to the joke example, it should be clear that he is not attempting to elucidate the ordinary concept of assertion.
27. Grice defined conversational implicature disjunctively, referring in that definition to a situation in which a speaker either says or makes as if to say something. The latter disjunct is intended to include cases such as metaphor and irony. However, saying is most naturally construed as a locutionary act, and on this construal, making as if to say something is possible but requires considerable stage setting. By contrast, for Grice, one who for instance speaks ironically makes as if to illocute, rather than making as if to locute. Green (2017d) discusses Grice's view on irony at further length.
 28. Less pressing for present purposes, but also of note, the B-list contains at least one member unlike the others. For all that the use of the term mandates, one can convey a proposition simply by bringing it to someone's attention, as would normally be achieved by an utterance of "Consider the proposition that P." By contrast, the other items on the list seem to require their propositional content to be speaker-meant.

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